



Idaho Naturalist news

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A “Must” Book for Every Naturalist

Terry Thomas, IDFG biologist and author

Since The Best of Nature is created from the very best of 16 years of my nature essays published weekly in the Idaho Falls Post Register (online readership 70,000), The Best of Nature is a fine read. It covers a wide variety of topics including humorous glimpses of nature, philosophy, natural history, and conservation. Readers praise the style, breadth of subject matter, and my ability to communicate complex and emotional topics in a relaxed and understandable manner.

Everyone can find something to love in this book. From teenagers to octogenarians, from the coffee shop to the school room, these nature essays are widely read and enjoyed.

Most of the essays have an important message or lesson that will resonate with you. Some of the columns are my personal favorites; others seemed to strike a chord with readers. Some will make you laugh out loud; and others will bring a tear to your eye and warm your heart. They are written with a goal to simultaneously entertain and educate about the wonderful workings of nature.

Visit Terry’s website for more information and links to order the book.

www.nature-track.com



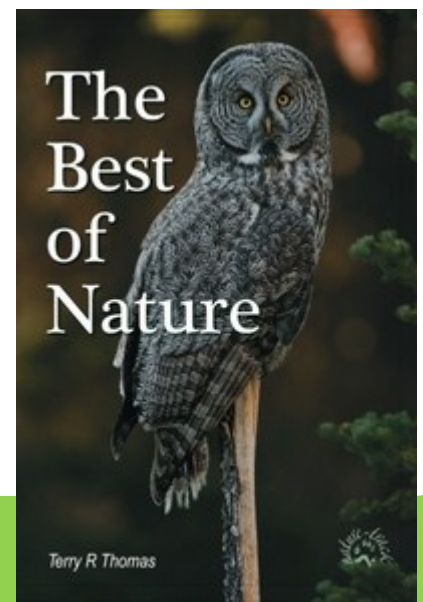
The Idaho Naturalist News is a quarterly newsletter of the Idaho Master Naturalist Program.

Edited by Linda Kahn and Sara Focht

For questions and comments contact Sara Focht at Sara.Focht@idfg.idaho.gov.

Send newsletter contributions to Linda Kahn at hcmc214@yahoo.com.

The book cover is as amazing as the book. Photo by Terry Thomas.



2013 Volunteer Hour Totals

Sara Focht, Idaho Master Naturalist Program Coordinator

It is not about the numbers, and it is not a competition, but calculating annual volunteer numbers is part of what I must do to report the program successes. I am proud, each and every year, to present the volunteer numbers to my co-workers and supervisors here at Idaho Department of Fish and Game. In the calendar year of 2013, 14,291.25 volunteer hours were logged on the electronic timesheet system.

Upper Snake Chapter (Idaho Falls)	5837.25 hours
BYU Idaho subchapter (Rexburg)	133.75 hours
Pend Oreille Chapter (Sandpoint)	2568.75 hours
Henry's Fork Chapter (Island Park)	2320.75 hours
Sagebrush-steppe Chapter (Boise)	2276.00 hours
McCall Chapter (McCall)	841.75 hours
Pocatello Chapter (Pocatello)	274.00 hours
TVCC Chapter (Ontario)	39.00 hours
TOTAL.....	14291.25 hours for 2013!

Hummingbirds in Winter

Kristen Barstad, Idaho Master Naturalist, Sagebrush-steppe Chapter



An Anna's Hummingbird! On February 6th! While waiting for the feeder to defrost, I put the flowered base outside with a more concentrated food mix and had 2 hummingbirds come to it. I think I'll put some Christmas lights around it to help it stay warm. (I saw that on the internet!) Photo and caption submitted by Kristen Barstad, Sagebrush-steppe Master Naturalist, Boise.



Brigham Young University Sub-Chapter Offers Coursework for Master Naturalists

Tracey Anderson, Brigham Young University Adjunct Professor and Upper Snake Master Naturalist

The Brigham Young University—Idaho sub-chapter of Idaho Master Naturalist Program (IMNP) will soon start their annual course providing opportunity for registered students to become certified Idaho Master Naturalists. The course, called Environmental Interpretation, runs under the direction of Dr. Kari Archibald. Former student and current IMN, Tracey Anderson, is organizing this year's course.

Students in the course focus on the Conservation Education track of the IMNP. Along with the IMNP written curriculum, students study a text called Outdoor Education¹ and gain an understanding of the interpretation profession. Students are exposed to foundational scientific and teaching principles used by interpreters and develop their own personal philosophy concerning the role of interpreters. Students learn about employment opportunities in business, government, and recreation settings and gain an understanding of visitor characteristics and how visitors learn. Field trips, guest speakers, and a variety of assignments round out their learning and provide opportunities for students to apply skills in communications, human relations and learning theory.

This semester's students will be given opportunity to work with area biologist Eric Anderson in developing potential signs for a nature path at the Sand Creek Ponds, part of Idaho Fish and Game's Sand Creek Wildlife Management Area. Along with their course and volunteer work, students will put on an activity for area Cub Scouts applying what they learn throughout the course.

¹Gilbertson, K.; Bates, T.; Mclaughlin, T.; Ewert, A. 2006. Outdoor Education; Methods and Strategies, Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL.



Poster submitted by Lori Getts, Idaho Master Naturalist, Pend Oreille Chapter. The chapter uses this poster in their presentations and fair booths.

Hawk Survey

Evan Tibbott, Idaho Master Naturalist, Upper Snake Chapter

On January 31, Dave Godfrey and Evan Tibbott conducted a third winter hawk survey in the Mud Lake - Montevue area. The results were similar to the one conducted in December, focusing mainly on the annual migration of rough-legged hawks into the Upper Snake Plain. A total of 41 rough-legged hawks were counted, plus 3 adult bald eagles, 1 northern harrier and 1 American kestrel.

In contrast to December's survey, when the great majority of rough-leggeds were observed north of Highway 33 in the vicinity of Mud Lake-Montevue, a greater number were seen south of Highway 33. They were more evenly distributed over the entire area. The area is very dry with snow cover ranging from about an inch to large areas of bare ground, whereas the bottomlands west of Rexburg have total cover of several inches. The total count of rough-leggeds corresponds closely with December's total of 47 rough-leggeds, with 5 northern harriers, 1 adult bald eagle and 1 American kestrel. Dense fog in the vicinity of Rexburg made for some concern as we started out. Westward, the fog thinned out, breaking up gradually into late morning and early afternoon with visibility varying from less than a quarter mile to unlimited views of the Lost River, Lemhi and Beaverhead ranges, all the way to the Centennials along the northeastern horizon. The scenery from the farmlands is without parallel in its sense of timeless serenity. Much human history is reflected in its depths.



*Female northern harrier, hunting for mice, characteristically flies low over a field.
Photo by Teresa Meachum.*

Year Round Bird Survey

Teresa Meachum, Idaho Master Naturalist, Upper Snake Chapter

Getting up before daylight and heading out to look for birds might not interest many people. However, a group of mostly Master Naturalists from the Upper Snake Chapter, along with a few people from the Snake River Audubon Society, has been doing just that since May 2013. Year-round, monthly bird surveys are being conducted at four Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-managed recreation sites within the Upper Snake Field Office with the objective of acquiring baseline data on species composition and relative abundance.

Similar surveys had previously been conducted for the field office but only during migration months. The current surveys are an on-going effort that will continue throughout the entire year, and for multiple years. These surveys are walking surveys that cover pre-established areas, where all birds that are either seen or heard are recorded. Some surveys start at sunrise, while others are performed later in the day, with all surveys lasting for four hours. Data collected from this project will provide

the BLM with valuable information on species composition and relative abundance across different habitat types (i.e. upland vs. riparian) and across seasons. Additionally, the collected data will be used to provide information for interpretive and educational materials for public use.



*Blue-grey Gnatcatcher seen along Lava Trails.
Photo by Teresa Meachum, IMN.*



*Mark Whitham (IMN) surveying Menan Boat Ramp.
Photo by Donna Whitham, IMN.*

Currently, the four sites being monitored include: Cress Creek, Lava Trails, Menan Boat Ramp, and Menan Butte. All four sites are open to the public. With the exception of Lava Trails, they are being monitored at least once a month, even through the winter. Due to safety precautions of walking on snow-covered lava, Lava Trails is not monitored from December through February.

Continued on next page

Cress Creek has a varied habitat including sagebrush-grass, juniper-covered hillsides, a watercress-lined creek, and the Snake River nearby. Menan Boat Ramp, as the name implies, is primarily a riparian area located along the Snake River but does abut nearby agricultural fields.

Similar in overall habitat, Menan Butte is a large volcanic tuff cone formed when basaltic magma boiled up through ground water, while the Lava Trails traverses through 5,200 year-old basaltic lava flow in a desert ecosystem of the Snake River Plain.

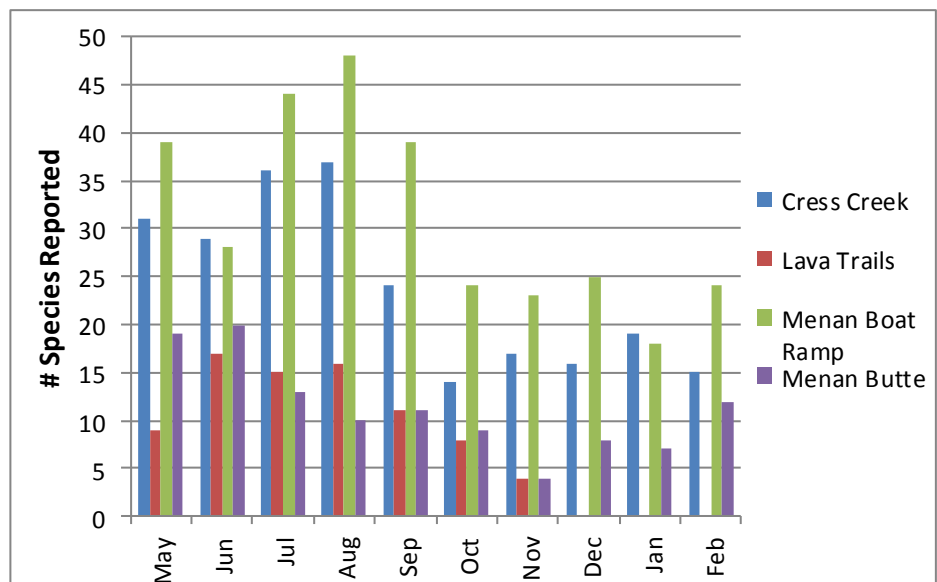
Between May 2013 and February 2014, observers identified 126 different species and recorded a total of 9,103 observations across the 4 survey locations. Species richness varied amongst the survey locations, ranging from 39 species (Lava Trails) to 95 species (Menan Boat Ramp). The highest numbers of recorded species were reported for the month of August at both Menan Boat Ramp (48) and Cress Creek (37), and for the month of June at both Menan Butte (20) and Lava Trails (17).



Cress Creek in winter. Photo by Julie Britton-Wemple, IMN.



Inside Menan Butte cone in spring . Photo by Teresa Meachum, IMN.



Number of species reported by month between May 2013 and February 2014.

Bear Tracks

Lori Getts, Idaho Master Naturalist, Pend Oreille Chapter

On a walk in late March along Rapid Lightning Creek Road in the foothills of the Cabinet Mountains, I found a sign of spring: fresh bear tracks in the snow.



Enter your time!

Master Naturalists! Don't forget to enter your volunteer time at www.idahomasternaturalist.org. If you need assistance or have questions, contact Sara at sara.focht@idfg.idaho.gov or (208) 287 2606.



Photo by Mary Ann Cherry, Idaho Master Naturalist, Upper Snake Chapter. She took this photo in January in her backyard on the outskirts of Idaho Falls, where she has several feeders and also scatters wheat for the birds. They had ordinary pheasants come around fairly often, usually in male-female pairs, but this albino hen was a first. It has been coming for a couple months, always alone. While it is almost invisible when it crouches in snow under a bush, you have to wonder how it avoided becoming a predator's dinner during the summer.

After a Fire

Steve Berg, Idaho Master Naturalist, Sagebrush-steppe Chapter

On August 11, 2011, a fire (assumed to be of human origin) started next to the Boise-to-Idaho City Highway 21 just southwest of Lucky Peak Nursery. Despite helicopter water drops, heavy air tanker ferric oxide slurry drops, and the efforts of a hotshot fire crew, several heavy fire engines and a bulldozer, the fire swept over the hilltop and destroyed all vegetation on 120 acres west of the reservoir before containment.

On Saturday, January 18, 2014, a dozen volunteers, led by the ubiquitous Mary Dudley (IDFG), spent the day broadcasting sagebrush and rabbit brush seed throughout the devastated area. Most of the terrain was steep and inhospitable and held no shrubbery and very little foliage. While the sagebrush had been burned to the ground and only root holes lingered, rabbit brush was evident by its skeletal remains at odd intervals over ridge and plateau. Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentate*) can survive to 100 years of age, once it passes the seedling stage, but cannot withstand fires – seed can only be reintroduced from outside in order to revive the species. Further, only infrequent small sprouts of cheat grass and bunchgrasses punctuated the sand and dirt surface.



We spread seed mixtures judiciously, sometimes with the aid of wind on ridges, but often in the stillness of ravines and gullies, many exaggerated by erosion unchecked by plant life. Our group intermittently covered territory from the snow-covered Hilltop to the edge of the water. Hopefully, near-future precipitation will anchor seed to crevasse and surface, where it can take root and commence growing to once again provide a viable spread of food and cover for deer, antelope, elk, foxes and coyotes, birds and small mammals.

Above: North arm of Lucky Peak Reservoir showing rabbit brush skeletons on an otherwise empty slope. Below, volunteers rally and a bucket of tiny sagebrush seed awaits its destiny.



Idaho Master Naturalists Lead Junior Naturalist Program

For the third year, Joyce Harvey-Morgan (Idaho Master Naturalist, Sagebrush-steppe Chapter) led the Junior Naturalist program at the MK Nature Center over spring break. Joyce is committed to sharing her passion about nature with children. Pictured right, Joyce helps the kids make raccoon scat cookies. They were delighted how real-looking and delicious the cookies were. Below, Joyce walks with student in the Nature Center. The lower right photo shows Joyce leading a hike in the foothills ... a very popular activity during the week.



Sandy Sweet (Idaho Master Naturalist, Sagebrush-steppe Chapter) helps teach the Junior Naturalist Program at MK Nature Center for the third year! Pictured here, Sandy holds an owl pellet for a student to dissect (upper left). Posing with her field group, they all smile at the toad they found (above). Helping a student identify a tree (left). Sandy has been a Master Naturalist since 2011 and has certified every year since.

